

Native Women Lose Over \$1.1 Million to the Racist and Sexist Wage Gap

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Despite being original inhabitants and stewards of this land, Native women have never been compensated for the full value of their labor in the U.S. workforce, and this inequity persists today. In 2021, the most recent data available, Native women working full time, year round were typically paid only 57 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹ This gap in pay typically amounts to a loss of \$2,400 every month or \$28,797 every year. If this gap isn't closed, a Native woman starting her career today stands to lose \$1,151,880 over a 40-year career.²

As bad as these losses are, the wage gap for full-time, year-round workers doesn't fully reflect the true economic disparities faced by many Native women. The full-time, year-round wage gap leaves out those Native women who were unemployed or out of the labor force for part of the year, or who worked part time, even if they wanted full-time work. This is especially significant when we consider the 2021 data, as the labor market shifted dramatically in 2020 and its effects continued in 2021. Millions of jobs were lost as the result of the pandemic, particularly among low-paid women workers, while others were forced into part-time work. When we include part-time and part-year workers in the comparison, Native women were typically paid only 51 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in 2021.³

Wage gap figures for Native women working full time, year round vary widely by community. For example, Blackfoot, Tohono O'odham, and Yaqui women make just 51 cents while Iñupiat women make 89 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Whatever the wage gap for Native women, lost earnings due to the racist and sexist wage gap have robbed them of the economic security they needed in the pandemic amid job loss, food insecurity, and general uncertainty about their health and safety.

The wage gap will typically cost a Native woman over \$1.1 million over a lifetime of work.

A loss of 43 cents on the dollar adds up over a month, a year, and a lifetime. Native women working full time, year round are typically losing \$2,400 each month or \$28,797 each year. This annual wage gap could have paid for nearly a year of child care, ten months of food, and 6 months of rent.⁴ It could have been a lifeline for Native women and their families during the pandemic.

If today's median wage gap does not close, a Native woman stands to lose a staggering \$1,151,880 over the course of a 40-year career. Assuming a Native woman and her white, non-Hispanic male counterpart both begin work at age 20, the wage gap means a Native woman would have to work until she is 90 years old to catch up to what a white, non-Hispanic man was paid by age 60.⁵ In other words, a Native woman would have to work 15 years beyond her current life expectancy.⁶ In reality, she would never be able to catch up and match a white, non-Hispanic man's earnings.

Racist and sexist wage gaps have always existed – but the pandemic drove new, harmful economic fissures along racial and gender lines. As we recover from the economic fallout of COVID-19, we must address our long underinvestment in economic and social infrastructure and the inadequate protections that left many women stranded at the intersection of the racial and gender inequities laid bare by the pandemic.

Some communities of Native women experience substantially wider wage gaps.⁷

Although Native women working full time, year round typically make 57 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, the wage gap varies widely and women of many Native communities experience much larger wage gaps compared to white, non-Hispanic men than Native women overall. For example, Blackfoot, Tohono O'odham, and Yaqui women make just 51 cents while Iñupiat women make 89 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

HOW MUCH NATIVE WOMEN WORKING FULL TIME, YEAR ROUND LOSE TO THE WAGE GAP BY COMMUNITY

Community	Native women's earnings	What Native women make for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men make	Native women's typical annual losses	Native women's typical losses over a 40-year career
Aleut women	\$46,387	\$0.76	\$14,363	\$574,520
Apache women	\$32,703	\$0.54	\$28,047	\$1,121,880
Blackfoot women	\$30,925	\$0.51	\$29,825	\$1,193,000
Cherokee women	\$37,110	\$0.61	\$23,640	\$945,600
Chickasaw women	\$37,753	\$0.62	\$22,997	\$919,880
Chippewa women	\$37,867	\$0.62	\$22,883	\$915,320
Choctaw women	\$37,753	\$0.62	\$22,997	\$919,880
Creek women	\$39,000	\$0.64	\$21,750	\$870,000
Hopi women	\$35,000	\$0.58	\$25,750	\$1,030,000
Iñupiat women	\$53,825	\$0.89	\$6,925	\$277,000
Iroquios women	\$35,437	\$0.58	\$25,313	\$1,012,520
Lumbee women	\$34,017	\$0.56	\$26,733	\$1,069,320
Navajo women	\$33,412	\$0.55	\$27,338	\$1,093,520
Pima women	\$33,439	\$0.55	\$27,311	\$1,092,440
Powatomi women	\$45,800	\$0.75	\$14,950	\$598,000
Pueblo women	\$34,300	\$0.56	\$26,450	\$1,058,000
Puget Sound Salish women	\$45,000	\$0.74	\$15,750	\$630,000
Sioux women	\$31,853	\$0.52	\$28,897	\$1,155,880
Tlingit women	\$46,387	\$0.76	\$14,363	\$574,520
Tohono O'odham women	\$31,281	\$0.51	\$29,469	\$1,178,760
Yaqui women	\$30,925	\$0.51	\$29,825	\$1,193,000
Yup'ik women	\$36,958	\$0.61	\$23,792	\$951,680

NWLC calculations using 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-year sample using IPUMS-USA available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. White, non-Hispanic men typically made \$60,750 between 2016-2020. Figures are based on women's and men's median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Figures are not adjusted for inflation. Small sample sizes prevented an analysis for Cheyenne women, Comanche women, Crow women, and Seminole women.

Unequal pay means Native women have less money to cover their current expenses at a moment when every penny counts. It also has ripple effects that mean Native women miss key opportunities throughout their lifetimes to build wealth and future economic security for themselves and their families. The wage gap means many cannot save enough to afford a down payment on a home, cannot afford to pay for their own or a child's higher education, cannot start a business or save for retirement.

Losses due to gender and racial wage gaps are devastating for Native women and their families, many of whom lose tens of thousands of dollars annually to the wage gap. This harms not only native women, but the families who depend on their income. The COVID-19 crisis underscores the need to close the wage gap now. Native women cannot afford to wait.

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- 1 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey [hereinafter 2021 ACS], tables B20017C and B20017H. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers. Men and women self-identify their sex and race/ethnicity in the ACS. Native women self-identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native. White, non-Hispanic men self-identified as white and specified that they were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Wage gap figures are calculated by taking the median earnings of women and men working full-time, year-round. Median earnings describe the earnings of a worker at the 50th percentile – right in the middle.
 - 2 NWLC calculations based on 2021 ACS, tables B20017C and B20017H. Figure assumes a wage gap of \$28,797—the gap in median earnings between full-time, year-round working Native American women (\$37,897) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$66,694) in 2021—each year for 40 years. Figures are not adjusted for inflation.
 - 3 NWLC calculations 2021 ACS, tables B20017C and B20017H. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers. Men and women self-identify their sex and race/ethnicity in the ACS. Native women self-identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native. White, non-Hispanic men self-identified as white and specified that they were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Wage gap figures for all workers are calculated by taking the median earnings of women and men working any number of hours or week. Median earnings describe the earnings of a worker at the 50th percentile – right in the middle.
 - 4 NWLC calculations using 2021 ACS tables B20017C and B20017H; Child Care Aware of America, *The US and the High Cost of Child Care 2020 Report Appendices*, <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Demanding%20Change%20Appendices.pdf>; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food Report for September 2022*, using low-cost food plan for a family of four (one adult man and one adult woman ages 19-50 and children 6-8 and 9-11), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-reports-monthly-reports>; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, *Selected Housing Characteristics*, Table DP04, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp04&tid=ACSDP1Y2021.DP04>.
 - 5 This assumes workers begin work at age 20 and work for 40 years, retiring at age 60. In order to make up the nearly \$1 million lost to the wage gap, Native American women would need to work 27 more years in order to catch up.
 - 6 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *Life expectancy at birth, age 65, and age 75, by sex, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, selected years 1900-2019*, Table LExpMort, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/aus/2020-2021/LExpMort.pdf>. American Indian or Alaskan Native, not Hispanic women's life expectancy at birth was 75 years in 2019.
 - 7 NWLC calculations using 2016-2020 ACS, accessed through Ruggles et al., *IPUMS USA*.